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ABSTRACT

The politics of education is a new field of research specialization both in education and in political science. As with any new field, the politics of education faces a number of problems. On the other hand, it shows promise of being able to make important contributions both in increasing our understanding of educational and political systems and in providing substantial help in tackling current pressing educational problems. The aim of this paper is to describe briefly the development of the politics of education to date, to note some of the main literature that has been produced, particularly in the United States and in Australia, and to discuss some of the problems the politics of education faces and some of the possibilities it offers. A substantial bibliography is included. (Author)

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The Politics of Education: Development and Literature, Problems, Possibilities

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Internationally, as well as in Australia, the politics of education is a very new field of research specialization both in education and political science. Two American scholars actively involved in research in this field in 1969 described it as 'a new and still largely uncharted area of research concentration' and 'a fledgling area of research that has not yet developed a distinctive empirical base and methodological sophistication'.[1] But it is developing quickly today and is attracting interest from scholars in both education and political science. As with any new field the politics of education faces a number of problems. However, on the other hand, it shows every promise of being able to make important contributions both in increasing our understanding of educational and political systems and in providing substantial help in tackling current pressing educational problems.

The aim of this paper is to describe briefly the development of the politics of education to date, to note some of the main literature that has been produced particularly in the United States and Australia, and to discuss some of the problems the politics of education faces and some of the possibilities it offers.

DEVELOPMENT AND LITERATURE

Although the politics of education is such a new field of research concentration, it should be noted that among philosophers and students of politics and education there has been a long tradition of interest in the links between education and political life and behaviour - a tradition that goes back at least as far as the world of ancient Greek scholarship. Aristotle, for example, was firmly convinced that education was a proper concern of government. He argued that 'the education of youth ought to form the principal part of the legislators attention ...since education first molds, and afterwards sustains the various modes of government'.[2] Moreover, in the world of practical affairs, both political leaders and school administrators have long been well ware of the existence of links between education and politics, and of the possibility of using these to achieve particular goals. In totalitarian regimes, for instance, political

leaders have employed the schools as tools to propagate particular ideologies, while in our Western society there has been broad consensus among educators that training for democratic citizenship is a vital part of the proper role of the school.

Yet despite this long tradition of scholarly and practical concern with links between education and politics, in modern times until very recently indeed neither political scientists nor educational researchers showed any real interest in serious research in the political aspects or functions of education or the connections between education and politics. Admittedly, there were a few notable exceptions. In political science, for example, Charles Merriam[3] of the University of Chicago, one of the most influential American political scientists of the 1920s and 1930s, took a keen research interest in political teaching and civic education in schools and also in the government of public school systems, while in New Zealand in the late 1930s Leicester Webb[4] produced a detailed study of the control and administration of New Zealand education. Among students of education there were some exceptions too. To take Australian examples, in the 1920s Cole and Gollan[5] explored aspects of the organisation and administration of the New South Wales education system, while in the mid-1930s King[6] published his book, Nationalism and Education in Australia. But overall political scientists were not at all interested in education, while students of education almost completely ignored the political dimensions of education and the importance of the political contexts in which schools and educational systems operate.[7]

The politics of education began its development in the United States not much more than a decade ago. In the late 1950s and early 1960s a small number of scholars in both political science and education quite suddenly became interested in the field. They came to the politics of education by different routes, and developed their interest in response to sets of different stimuli. Some were led to the politics of education through following their ongoing research where it led them; a good example is David Easton who apparently developed his interest in the political role of education

through his work in the application of systems theory to politics. Others were attracted to the politics of education by the increasing political conflict on school desegregation, by growing demands for greater community control of schools, by the increasing public unrest about public education, by the growing militancy of teachers and by the increasing role being played in education by the U.S. Federal Government and the very strong demands for greater federal involvement. In the early stages there was minimal or no contact at all between scholars at different centres. But once the first results of research were published in the journals[8] and the first books appeared contact between researchers soon increased and interest in the field spread remarkably quickly. By 1965 a number of major books together with numerous journal articles had appeared; some of the more important of these books were Burkhead's[9] Public School Finance: Economics and Politics, Kimbrough's[10] Political Power and Educational Decision-Making, Greenstein's[11] Children in Politics, the detailed study of educational politics at state level by Masters, Salisbury and Eliot,[12] and two substantial volumes of essays on education and politics in developing countries.[13] Since 1965 the volume of literature has increased vastly and there is now a rich and exciting literature on many aspects of the politics of American education, as well as studies by American scholars of politics and education in other countries. Of course, as in any new field the quality of the literature varies greatly, but some of it is particularly good by any standards. For example, there are the scholarly studies of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its implementation by Bailey and Mosher, Meranto, and Eidenberg and Morey.[14] Or again, there are the studies of Easton and Dennis, Hess and Torney, Zeigler, Merelman, and Hirsch[15] on political socialization, those of Eulau and Quinley, Baldridge and Berdahl[16] on aspects of the politics of higher education, and those of Rosenthal and Cole on the pressure group behaviour of teacher organisations.[17] There is also important material on urban school politics [18] and some good studies by Americans of politics and education in other societies, particularly developing ones.[19] In addition there is the recently published

volume of essays edited by Kirst[20] on research directions for the politics of education. The essays in this volume are a selection of the papers which were presented at a special Research Workshop on the 'Politics of Elementary and Secondary Education' held at Stanford University in September 1970 and at which leading scholars in political science and education participated. Today in the United States research in the politics of education is being pursued in numerous departments of political science and schools of education within universities and colleges, as well as in special research centres. Since 1969 a special 'interest group' on the politics of education has operated within the American Educational Research Association. The politics of education has also become an important teaching field, particularly within educational administration departments and programmes.

Outside the United States the politics of education is much less developed, although important progress has been made in a number of countries including Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. In Australia the real growth has taken place only since the late 1960s. But already a sizeable number of graduate students, together with a few established scholars, are actively involved in research projects on a wide variety of topics. Courses or course units in the politics of education have also been introduced by education faculties and political science departments in a number of universities. Because of the recent development of the field in Australia it is not surprising that the published literature is still very limited. The most important work by far is Partridge's book, Society, Schools and Progress in Australia. This gives a clear and thoughtful account of some of the major aspects of Australian education, its control and questions of education policy. But it does not pretend to provide a detailed or comprehensive coverage of the politics of Australian education. There are a few useful papers of a general nature,[22] a limited number of case-studies such as that by Gill[23] on the Commonwealth Government's science laboratory grant scheme, a monograph by Albinski[24] on the Labor Party and State Aid and another by Bessant and Spaull[25] on teacher unions, writings by

Tannock and others on Commonwealth involvement in education and federal-state relations,[26] a few pieces on student politics,[27] and a number of papers relating to the internal government of the universities and to university-government relations.[28] Then, too, there is some exciting work by Connell and Davies[29] on political socialization, writings by Turner and others on decentralization,[30] a couple of papers by Simpkins[31] on the aspects of the internal politics of schools and a number of historical studies which touch on public education and government policy.[32] This published work hardly constitutes an extensive and satisfactory literature. Of course, apart from the published literature there is a growing collection of unpublished theses.[33] But taking these into account too on many important aspects the surface has been barely scratched, and on others there has been no serious research at all.

In the United Kingdom a somewhat larger volume of literature has been produced than in Australia, although in a number of respects the politics of education as a field of research specialization is no more advanced.[34]

In Canada,[35] and also in New Zealand,[36] if we take relative size into account, the development of interest has been roughly on a par with that in Australia, although less material has yet been published.

PROBLEMS

Because it is impossible to deal here with all the major problems that face the politics of education and scholars working within the field, I propose to concentrate on a small number that to me seem particularly important.

Possibly the most serious problem is the great deal of confusion that exists about the proper focus, scope and boundaries for the field. With any new research field, some confusion on these matters can be expected, but the politics of education seems to have had more than its fair share. This may spring largely from the ambiguity that surrounds the term politics. But whatever reasons there are for the confusion, clearly what is needed is serious discussion and debate among those involved in research in the field

together with others who because of special expertise can be of assistance, and efforts to reach some kind of broad consensus. Unfortunately there has been little discussion of this problem, and certainly no broad consensus exists.

In the hope of promoting discussion let me briefly offer some personal views. I would define the politics of education as being concerned with the many and complex relations between education and political life in societies, with the political aspects and functions of educational institutions and processes, and with the educative role and impact of political institutions and political processes. Proper questions to explore in the Australian context would include the following. What forms do the linkages between politics and education take? How is public education controlled and administered, and how is public policy on education made? How precisely are State and Commonwealth departments and agencies concerned with education structured, and how does the real exercise of power conform to the formal arrangement of authority? What possible alternative patterns are there? Where are the really crucial policy decisions on education made at State and Commonwealth levels, and who participates in policy-making at each level on particular issue-areas? What political influence do pressure groups, political parties, Ministers, Parliaments, and bureaucrats command? What complications are caused by federalism? What kind of impacts are particular education policies having on particular groups and individuals in society? Who is benefiting and who is being disadvantaged? How are different kinds of educational institutions governed, and how is policy within them formulated? In what ways do educational institutions have significant impacts on the operation of the political system? Are schools really influential in developing particular political attitudes and orientations in young people? What educative roles are performed by particular government departments? In my view the politics of education should be concerned with a very wide range of problems and questions; I see its boundaries as being wide and its scope broad. Among other things it should focus on education as an

area with public policy and public responsibility on conflict, decision-making and the exercise of power on educational matters from all levels up from the individual schools and the local community on the one hand up to State and national government on the other, on demand, policy content and policy outcomes, on the impact of educational institutions and formal and informal education processes on political institutions and behaviour, and on the important educative roles performed by institutions which are mainly political in their purposes and orientations. In attempting to define the proper focus, scope and boundaries for the politics of education I would not limit education to formal or institutional education, and I would define politics in terms of all those processes in societies concerned with power and influence and the authoritative allocation of resources and values. Obviously, according to my cnnception, the politics of education shares common concerns with other fields in education and political science, and also with other disciplines such as sociology and history. But this causes me no worry. Overlapping boundaries is a feature common not only to the social sciences but to most branches of learning.

A second problem is that of developing a sense of identity and community among scholars involved in research in the politics of education. A number of factors have operated to retard the development of this sense of identity and community. In the first place, most researchers come from both political science and education, two disciplines which in the past have had little contact with one another. Both have their distinctive methodologies and approaches, and their own bodies of literature. This barrier provides some real obstacles. Further, political scientists and educationalists often appear to approach research in the same areas of the politics of education with different primary goals; the political scientist often tends to see education as merely another policy area of government in which he can carry out research to further advance knowledge about pressure groups, public bureaucracies and so on in general, while the student of education tends either to be interested in finding solutions to current pressing

problems in education, or with providing new understandings about educational institutions and processes. A second factor is that up to the present time most established scholars working on aspects of the politics of education have come from other fields withing education and political science and understandably they continue to think in terms of these fields. Often they see their work in the politics of education as part or a logical extension of their original field. This appears to be particularly true of political scientists interested in areas such as urban school politics, pressure groups in education, or political socialization. Of course, this is quite a legitimate view, especially when such political scientists continue to have their major teaching and research interests in urban politics, pressure groups, or political socialization without exclusive reference to education. The fact that the politics of education embraces so many aspects, many of them not so closely related to one another, has also made it more difficult for a sense of community to develop. For example, in the United States scholars working on urban school politics sometimes see little in common with those interested in policy-making or political structures with regard to education at State or federal levels, or with those engaged in survey research on the political attitudes of children. Another important factor is one common with all new fields. Until a sizeable body of literature has been built up, and until professional associations and journals have been established, there is often little impetus for researchers to think in terms of being part of a new field. While the lack of a sense of identity and community will not stop important advances being made in research, there is every reason to believe that the growth of identity and community will help stimulate and facilitate important advances in research. Among other things it will help develop closer contacts between scholars, bridge the gap between political scientists and educationalists and between those working in different areas, and help researchers see their own work in a wider perspective.

A third problem relates to priorities for research. So far in

both the United States and Australia researchers have tended to rush in and begin work with little thought about overall priorities or where the greatest payoffs might be found. Because the field is so vast and because manpower and financial resources are limited, it seems only sensible that researchers in each country should ask themselves how available resources can be best utilized. Would it be preferable in Australia, for example, if efforts were concentrated on a limited range of topics rather than spread thinly and most possibly rather ineffectively across the board? Are there a small number of topics that can be identified as being of really significant importance? What kind of balance should we aim for between pure and applied research, between detailed case-studies and surveys and aggregating findings from many studies, and between studies at one single point of time and longitudinal studies? While we may well find it impossible to get any broad agreement on these matters, we can at least hope that the issues involved will receive serious discussion.

Finally, in this section I wish to mention the problem of developing and adapting suitable theoretical frameworks, methodologies and approaches to tackle specific research problems. Some American scholars are particularly concerned about this problem. For example, Wirt believes that 'the significant factor accounting for scholarly inattention to educational politics is the lack of a theoretical orientation and methodology applicable to analysis of ... [the] vast data source'.[37] Or again, Kirst and Mosher are concerned that the politics of education 'has not yet developed a distinctive empirical base and methodological sophistication' and are disappointed that 'neither of the parent disciplines - political science or education - has provided clear concepts nor ready-made, tried-and-tested methods'.[38] This concern in many respects is a healthy sign; if significant advances are to be made in research, then a major effort must be made in theoretical and methodological innovation. But at the same time I would sound a note of caution. We should recognise that the situation today in the politics of education is a typical condition in the early stages of scholarship

in any new field, and it is also common in any established social science discipline when new problems are being tackled. Further, I find it hard to share Kirst and Mosher's degree of concern that the politics of education has not yet developed a 'distinctive' methodological base, and I am somewhat sceptical of the assertion that political science and education have little to offer. In many respects, at least for a political scientist, a great number of the problems in the politics of education are not vastly different from those in other fields of public policy and in other areas of government concern. In many cases, in fact, the differences are very slight indeed. While research in any area can be expected to develop some distinctive methodologies of its own, I would expect political scientists working in the politics of education for a reasonably long time to continue to draw largely on methodologies and approaches common to political science in general. On the second point made by Kirst and Mosher experience to date shows that political science and education have quite a deal to offer. Take the case of political science. Admittedly, within political science there is often dissatisfaction that there are few satisfactory over-arching theories or theoretical frameworks, and there is certainly a lack of consensus about the value and utility of many approaches and frameworks in common use. Nevertheless, there are many theoretical apprcaches that are suitable for projects in the politics of education and that, moreover, have already been used to advantage. System theory is one example, but there are others too. For instance, Rosenthal's[39] study of teachers' organisations draws on pressure group theory, and particularly on the work of Harry Eckstein. Thus, while every effort should be made to develop new theoretical frameworks and approaches, we should not set out expectations unreasonably high, neither should we overlook the contributions that other fields in political science and education may be able to make.

POSSIBILITIES

What possibilities are there in this field? What payoffs

might we reasonably expect from a substantial research effort?

In the first place, research in the politics of education should enable the compilation of detailed bodies of information that will add to our knowledge about educational and political systems - information about the political contexts in which schools, colleges and universities operate, about the way our educational systems and institutions are governed, about policy-making processes and the kinds of constraints that operate on policy-makers at all levels, about conflict and conflict resolution within institutions, about why teachers, students and community groups are becoming increasingly active politically, and so on.

Knowledge of this kind is worth finding for its own sake. But it could be of particular help to teachers, educational administrators and students preparing themselves for a career in the education industry. With so much debate about educational issues and with so much unrest among teachers themselves, teachers and school administrators today clearly require far more than a superficial understanding of the political context in which schools operate and the processes by which the really fundamental decisions on education at all administrative levels are made. Without real understanding they will be unable to see clearly their own roles and that of the school, make the best use of the freedom and opportunities they enjoy, and participate effectively in decision-making processes.

Finally, there is good reason to believe that research in the politics of education will be able to provide substantial help in tackling some current pressing problems in education today. I can see many areas where contributions could possibly be made. Research personnel may well be able to successfully identify major weaknesses in present systems of educational organisation and management, and to suggest alternatives which will enable schools and school systems to operate more effectively and efficiently for the benefit of students, teachers and community. There are exciting possibilities for projects aimed to improve policy-making procedures within educational systems and educational institutions.

So often high policy-making on education in Australia is an extremely slow and tedious business, while at other times it is characterised by ad hoc and hasty responses to sudden crises or to public controversies. Clearly there is a need to critically review and analyse current procedures and approaches, and to endeavour to devise means of ensuring that policy-making is as smooth and rational as possible, that there are means of taking decisions quickly but sensibly on urgent matters, and that in general policies are based on the analysis of detailed and accurate information and, where applicable, on research findings. Then again with economists research personnel in the politics of education may be able to assist in providing detailed information about the precise impact of current policies and the way that they are being administered. Further, I see possibilities for providing help in the understanding of processes of innovation. So often policy-makers decide on new programmes but all kinds of difficulties emerge which frustrate their successful implementation. My guess is that it would be helpful for administrators to have the various kinds of blockages identified and to have suggestions about possible alternative strategies. Another area where assistance could possibly be provided is in educational planning. Presumably those engaged in the planning and development of new institutions such as universities or CAE's would find it extremely helpful to have detailed information and analysis on the planning and development of other similar institutions - on what pressures and constraints operated at various stages, on what blockages occurred in attempting to implement policy decisions, on problems in anticipating demand for places and courses and in recruiting key staff, and on the views of those who were engaged in planning and implementing policy with regard to matters such as the order that key planning decisions should follow and the minimum time needed for the implementation of various decisions and between decisions.

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33. Some of the theses completed in Australian universities since the late 1960's include: I.K.F. Birch, 'Constitutional Responsibility for Education in Australia: The Federal Government's Latent Power', M.Ed. thesis, University of Western Australia, 1972; A.M. Badcock, 'Federalism and Education in Australia', M.A. thesis, Monash University, 1968; Arthur Davies, 'Two Australian Public Bureaucracies: Origins and Organization Change', Ph.D. thesis, University of New England, 1971; Vincent Horner, 'An Analysis of Policy -making in the Education Department of Western Australia' Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Australia, 1970; Helen R. McAulay, 'Activists in Student Government - A Study of the Voting Members of the -th Council of the University of Queensland, 1968; Christopher A. Rootes, 'Australian Student Radicals - the Nature and Origins of Dissent', B.A. honours thesis, University of Queensland, 1969; Andrew Bain, 'The Martin Report and Its Implementation', B.A. honours thesis, Australian National University, 1971, Bruce Mitchell, 'A History of the Public School Teachers' Organisations in New South Wales, 1855 to 1945', Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1969; D.M. Hudson, 'Post-Primary Teachers' Organisations in Victoria, 1905 - 1950', M.A. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1971; Andrew Spaull, 'Teachers and Politics: A Comparative Study of State Teachers' Organisations in Victoria and New South Wales since 1940', Ph.D. thesis, Monash University, 1972; B. Bessant, 'Education and Politics in the Development of the Education Systems of New South Wales and Victoria, 1900 - 1940, with particular, reference to Post-Primary Education, Ph.D. thesis, Monash University, 1971; C. Nicholson, 'The N.S.W. Liberal Party's State Aid Policy', B.A. honours thesis University of Sydney, 1967; I.W. Good, 'Church-State Relations in Education in Canberra Goulburn 1956-66' Litt. B. thesis, University of New England, 1967; Margery Nicholls, 'The State Aid Controversy', B.A. honours thesis, Monash University, 1966; L.A. Cox, 'A Political framework of Adolescent Students' M.A. thesis, University of New England, 1972; Judith M. Morton, ' A Survey of Political Orientations', B.A. honours thesis, University of Melbourne 1965; and Adrian R. Vicary, 'Education and Politics: An examination of political socialization in Australian Schools, and the politics of educational administration in Australia', B.A. honours thesis, University of Adelaide, 1970. There are also two doctoral dissertations completed at North American institutions: P.D. Tannock, 'The Role of the Government

of the Commonwealth of Australia in Education Since Federation, 1901-1968', Ph.D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1969; and Stuart Semple, 'The Role of the Federal Government in Certain Educational Activities in the Commonwealth of Australia 1901-1942,' Ed. D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1972.

34. Examples of substantial recent literature on aspects of the politics of education in the U.K. is as follows: Maurice Kogan, The Government of Education, Macmillan, London, 1971; Frank Musgrove, Patterns of Power and Authority in English Education, Methuen, London, 1971; Ronald A. Manzer, Teachers and Politics, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1970; David Martin, Anarchy and Culture: The Problem of the Contemporary University, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1969; Jerry L. Avorn et al., Universities in Revolt, Macdonald, London, 1969; T. Blackstone et al., Students in Conflict. L.S.E. in 1967, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1970; Harry Kidd, The Trouble at L.S.E. 1966 - 1967, Oxford University Press, London, 1969; Michael Parkinson, The Labour Party and the Organization of Secondary Education 1918-1965, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970.

35. In Canada although there are few substantial publications yet in the field a large number of theses have been produced. The best known substantial publications are probably Frank MacKinnon, The Politics of Education: A Study of the Political Administration of the Public Schools (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1960); Frederick Enns, The Legal Status of the Canadian Public School Board, Macmillan of Canada, Toronto, 1963; J.A. Corry, Universities and Governments, Gage, Toronto, 1969; Dorothy Eber, The Computer Centre Party: Canada meets Black Power, Tundra Books, Montreal, 1969; and A.B. Hodgetts, What Culture? What Heritage? A Study of Civic Education in Canada, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1968.

36. Important New Zealand work to date included: S.J. Ingle, 'A Comparative Study of Two Education Pressure Groups,' Political Science, Vol. 23, No. 1, May 1971, 'Party, Parliament and the Decline of Ideology in New Zealand: the Example of Education', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Vol. VIII, No. 2, July 1970, and 'The Politics of Education', Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1967; Robert William Heath, 'Labour Politics and education in New Zealand 1904-1935; a study of the origins of the Labour Party education policy', M.A. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1965; and Ruth Butterworth 'Education and Politics', in Richard J. Bates (ed.), Prospects in New Zealand Education

Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, 1970.

37. Frederick M. Wirt, 'Theory and Research Needs in the Study of American Educational Politics,' The Journal of Educational Administration, Vol. VIII, No. 1, May 1970.

38. Kirst and Mosher, op. cit.

39. Rosenthall, op. cit.